

Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee

SB 868 An Act Targeting State Financial Aid to Support Technical Training

Steve Bender, Executive Director of the 1199 Training and Upgrading Fund

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Members of the Committee:

I am Steve Bender, Executive Director of the 1199 Training and Upgrading Fund*. The Training Fund administers education and training benefits for members of District 1199, the New England Health Care Employees Union.

I am speaking in support of Senate Bill 868, an act targeting state financial aid to support technical training.

Through the Training Fund each year, hundreds of nursing home workers throughout Connecticut are able to attend school to work towards the dream of a better life for themselves and their families. Some are able to earn their high school diplomas; others earn college degrees; and there is another group that goes through technical training programs of various kinds, mostly in healthcare.

Though our members do have the benefits of the Training Fund, their costs are not always covered. I also know that there are many people in our state not fortunate enough to have benefits such as those offered through the Training Fund, and for whom a technical training program is an important first step in moving up the career ladder.

I would like to share the stories of a couple of our members who have recently completed school. I hope that these stories will help add a human touch to your considerations.

Judith was a Certified Nursing Assistant at the Wethersfield Healthcare Center that regrettably closed last year. She had worked there for 19 years. In the months leading up to her nursing home closing, Judith attended a phlebotomy training program at Manchester Community College. Upon her graduation, she wrote "I decided to go back to school for me and my family. I have always wanted to be a phlebotomist. I held my head high and strived for my goal. On December 20, 2011 that dream became a reality. I graduated from Manchester Community College and successfully completed the phlebotomy technician course. My words of advice: Pursue your dreams and never lose hope."

Sebastiana was a dietary worker, also at the Wethersfield Healthcare Center. She completed a Certified Nursing Assistant Course last year. Upon her graduation, she wrote, "When I was younger I never dreamed this could happen to me. Coming from a house consisting of two parents, seven sisters and one brother, my education had to be put aside to do household duties. Ever since then I have worked. As a single mother of four who works two jobs, I was very hesitant to go back to school. How was I going to hold two jobs, complete household tasks, and maintain good grades? But I did it. Finishing my training program has not only opened many doors for me but it has created a better future for myself and my family. It has always been a dream of mine to work in the nursing field, and now I have a chance to fulfill my dreams."

Thank you for your consideration of this bill, for all of the Judiths and Sebastianas out there.

**1199 Training and Upgrading Fund is also a member of the Campaign for a Working Connecticut*